

Halcon Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123707
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	359491
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Rodney Braithwaite

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	137
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend David Fayle
Headteacher	Vanessa Coles
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors saw 10 lessons or parts of lessons and observed six teachers. Meetings were held with senior leaders, a group of pupils, representatives of the governing body and a school improvement advisor. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including: monitoring, evaluation and assessment records; policy documents; school improvement plans and external evaluations of the school; and samples of pupils' work. Documents were scrutinised in relation to the safeguarding of pupils, including case studies of pupils in vulnerable circumstances. Inspectors examined questionnaires returned by 42 parents and carers, 60 pupils and 18 members of staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether teaching and learning are improving as a result of recent actions taken by the school.
- The evidence for school self-evaluation, and how accurate it is in prioritising the most urgent areas for improvement.
- How effectively school leaders, including governors, deal with issues identified for improvement in the school development plan, especially keeping pupils safe.
- Whether pupils know how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve, and how quickly any improvement in attainment and achievement is taking place.

Information about the school

Halcon is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Almost all pupils come from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, the largest group having moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than average, as are the numbers of pupils who join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The school has several mixed-age classes. It holds a breakfast club each day. The headteacher has been in post since January 2011. In the last two years, there has been some instability in staffing caused by long-term illness. The school holds Healthy Schools Plus status and the Eco Schools Green Flag award.

The nursery on the school site is privately managed so it is inspected separately.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' attainment and achievement throughout the school, their ability to develop basic skills in preparation for their future lives, and the use of progress information in planning for the individual learning needs of all pupils.

Though the overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate, there is evidence of good improvement in recent months. A major factor in the improvement has been the contribution of the headteacher, who in a short space of time, has, with effective support from a Local Authority Consultant Headteacher, identified a number of key priorities for rapid improvement. Her determined leadership has successfully gained the trust and backing of the majority of the staff and the governing body, who recognise the urgent need for improvement in the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and realistic and has resulted in a good school improvement plan. This has led to improvements in safeguarding procedures and policies as well as aspects of health and safety, elements of teaching, and the school's working environment. These successful actions, and the sound self-evaluation, demonstrate that the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Teaching has improved through robust monitoring, which has ensured better planning, including clearer learning objectives for lessons. This has led to some good teaching, although there is still not enough to raise achievement. New data tracking strategies have been introduced in order to get a clearer picture of pupils' progress. However, not all assessments about levels of attainment have been analysed in detail and the use of data is too inconsistent. The identified needs of individual pupils are not always taken into account when learning activities are planned. Teachers' marking and verbal guidance to pupils are also inconsistent, so pupils do not always understand what they need to do to improve.

There has not been time for the recent improvements to raise attainment to average levels. Pupils' attainment has been low in writing, reading and mathematics for several years, and over that time showed no sign of improvement, especially in Years 1 and 2. There is too little use and development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum.

The latest data show that the positive effect of steps taken is leading to better progress by pupils, especially in reading, and progress for the majority is at least satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. However, a small number of more able pupils are not making sufficient progress.

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The contribution of senior and middle managers has improved with their increasing share of responsibilities. However, not all managers have a clear understanding of their roles in raising pupils' performance. This limits how well weaknesses are identified in their respective areas of responsibility and slows their ability to take remedial action. The contribution of the governing body has improved. Governors have a clear idea of the school's needs, and offer more effective challenge as well as support to leaders.

Although achievement is not good enough, pupils are attentive, show obvious enjoyment of their work, and have good attitudes to learning. They behave well and try hard to succeed. Their personal development is a strength of the school. This is because pupils know how to keep themselves healthy and safe; are eager to hold responsibilities in the school as well as take part in activities in the local community. Pupils are well cared for and are confident that they can turn to adults in times of difficulty. They have a satisfactory knowledge of other faiths and cultures, and are enthusiastic about their links with pupils in Uganda.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and ICT by:
 - ensuring these skills are systematically practised and developed across the curriculum
 - ensuring that higher ability pupils attain the levels of which they are capable
- Ensure that teaching is good or better by:
 - checking rigorously that progress data and the moderation of pupils' work is accurate , especially in writing
 - using progress and tracking data more effectively to plan for the learning needs of every pupil
 - making sure, both verbally and through marking, that pupils understand what they need to do to improve.
- Accelerate the recent improvements in senior and middle management by ensuring all leaders:
 - have a clear understanding of their roles in raising standards and achievement
 - are able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility quickly and to take effective and decisive action.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Current data and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that attainment is improving although not strongly. This follows a period of three years when attainment at the end of Year 6 was low for a large majority of pupils. Though pupils often enter the school with lower standards than expected for their age, many underachieve, especially in Key Stage 1. Writing and reading have shown consistently low standards, although attainment in mathematics has generally been slightly better. Standards in speaking and ICT have also been low for a considerable time. The introduction of new assessment strategies has highlighted these deficiencies. Most pupils make at least the progress usually expected in

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lessons, but this is not always enough to raise their attainment. Few more able pupils, for example, make enough progress to reach the above average levels of which they are capable. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making satisfactory progress. Some of them make good progress, as a result of good management of their needs and effective interventions by teaching assistants and the special needs coordinator.

Pupils respond positively and enthusiastically to their lessons and behave well in classrooms and outside. They cooperate well with each other and are considerate of others' needs. This was seen in the Year 4 and Year 5 class, when pupils planned enthusiastically in groups a dramatic re-enactment of events in the story of Beowulf and the monster, Grendel. Pupils are happy in school and older ones, especially like their clubs, one of them saying, 'I like everything in school.' They are proud to have won some national awards, such as Healthy Schools Plus status, and the many who take school lunches can accurately identify food that is healthy. They feel safe and say other pupils behave safely in and around school. They are keen to take responsibilities in the classrooms and playground. They join wholeheartedly in local community activities, such as singing at the recent inauguration of the new local mayor. They enjoy team activities and the cross-country team was the top amongst Taunton schools recently. However, pupils' lack of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT means they are not prepared adequately for their future lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

During the inspection, teaching varied between good and satisfactory, although there were some inadequate features linked to the use of assessment. Throughout the school, teachers manage pupils well and there is mutual respect, good relationships, and sometimes good humour and laughter. Teaching assistants have a good partnership with teachers and a good challenging approach to their work with pupils who need support. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and sometimes good. As a result, work is relevant to pupils' interests and the subject matter. The use of stimulating resources helps pupils to become enthusiastic about their work. Learning tasks are usually clearly explained, enabling pupils to have confidence in tackling their learning. This was observed in the Year 1 and Year 2 class, when pupils had a variety of writing tasks about barn owls, and explained what they had learned. Although lesson objectives are made clear, not all teachers use their progress data to pitch work effectively for the differing needs and abilities of their pupils. Consequently the quality of planning is variable, and in some classes all pupils are given the same tasks. This leads to work that is unchallenging for some pupils and too difficult for others. Where this occurs, teachers' and assistants' time is taken up in additional explanation, and the pace of progress slows. The school identifies this issue as the main reason for the consistent underachievement of many pupils over time, and has successfully improved practice in many, but not all, of the classes. Much attention has been paid to improving marking. This has been effective in most classes, but there are still too many instances of cursory marking and a lack of guidance for pupils. A quarter of pupils in Years 3 to 6 indicated on their questionnaires that they did not know how well they were doing, although nearly all of them thought they 'learned a lot in lessons'.

The curriculum is balanced and there are examples of stimulating activities, such as pencil drawings expressing emotions like 'anger' and 'guilt', poems linked to the word 'black', and photographs of pupils involved in 'Let's Get Cooking' activities. However, school leaders are right in recognising that the curriculum lacks sufficient focus on the particular needs of pupils of different abilities. Extra-curricular clubs and activities such as knitting and aerobics are popular and enjoyed, but are provided mainly for older pupils. Provision for pupils' personal development is effective and contributes well to their attitudes, behaviour and relationships. Opportunities for developing English, mathematics and ICT across the curriculum are limited.

The school provides a welcoming and caring environment for pupils, which is reflected in their average attendance and enjoyment of school. There are good arrangements for the welfare and support of pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. These pupils benefit from the school's work with a wide range of support agencies and in particular from the good leadership of the experienced special needs coordinator. Induction arrangements for transition to secondary education are satisfactory. They are good from the on-site 'Circles' nursery to the Reception class, and subsequently into Year 1. A popular and well-managed breakfast club provides a good start to the day.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has accurately identified the most urgent areas for school improvement and has been well supported by a consultant headteacher improvement officer who has confirmed her evaluations. The staff have responded enthusiastically and share the headteacher's determination to secure improvement, especially in raising attainment and achievement in the basic skills. Several action plans have been introduced, with tight time frames and regular reviews of progress. As a result, good improvements have already been made in rectifying some deficiencies in safeguarding, health and safety, and in improving the school environment. Most staff have fully accepted the intense challenges set by the headteacher. For example, they appreciate that rigorous systems, including better moderation of assessments especially for writing, are necessary to ensure assessments are accurate. As a result of rigorous monitoring, teachers understand what is expected of them in order to improve their practice. Importantly, senior and middle leaders relish their new-found responsibilities. Nevertheless they realise that the school has much to do and they are not experienced in accountability for leading improvement.

Governance is satisfactory. The governing body has remedied its previous insufficient knowledge of the school's weaknesses. Governors are supportive of the initiatives of the headteacher, and recognise their role in the leadership of school improvement. Overall, the school promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily through its support of pupils who are vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It tackles discrimination effectively, ensuring that pupils are treated fairly and that the school is fully inclusive.

Safeguarding procedures meet requirements, and the governing body realises its importance in ratifying and reviewing policies on a regular basis. The school engages well with parents who, in the main, have very positive views of the school and see it as a centre of the local community. The partnership with the local authority has been particularly effective in securing the school's recent improvements. These partnerships make a strong and positive contribution to the good care the school provides for those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Promising partnerships are developing with the Taunton Learning Partnership of schools and the local nursery. Additionally, there are good links with a school in Uganda which results in pupils making pen pals and exchanging fascinating information about their local environments. This has contributed to the satisfactory provision of community cohesion by the school.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills often well below those expected for their age. The weakest areas are in communication, language and literacy, and in mathematical development. They make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning, and a few make good progress particularly in their social development. However, many still have low or below average skills for their age when they enter Year 1. Teaching is satisfactory and some observed during the inspection was good. Adults work well together as a team. Children enjoy their learning, are positive in their attitudes and when mixing with each other, and have good relationships with the adults in the classroom. This was observed when children were learning about mathematical shapes and enjoyed trying to describe them to other children.

The leadership and management are satisfactory and effective systems are now in place to measure regularly the progress children are making in all their skills. However, not enough ongoing analysis of this information is made to ensure that adults have an accurate and immediate overview of the progress individual children are making. Systems to ensure the safety of children are satisfactory. Parents are welcomed into the classroom and are provided regularly with guidance to help them support their children's learning and development. There is a good link with the private nursery next door, and children move on confidently when they transfer to Year 1.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Very few parents and carers who returned questionnaires made written comments. The great majority of questionnaires give very positive views of the school. Parents and carers strongly agree that their children enjoy school and that the school keeps their children safe and helps them to lead healthy lives. A few expressed concerns, particularly about how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors looked at this carefully and found that the school has clear behaviour management policies which are well understood by pupils and used consistently. One parent commented: 'Since coming here, my child's behaviour has improved very much.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Halcon Community Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 42 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 137 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	52	19	45	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	55	17	40	2	5	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	22	52	16	38	3	7	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	50	19	45	2	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	43	22	52	2	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	50	17	40	3	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	55	19	45	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	50	20	48	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	48	19	45	2	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	43	18	43	5	12	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	45	20	48	1	2	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	21	50	18	43	1	2	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	57	16	38	2	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Halcon Community Primary School, Taunton TA1 2BU

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. It was good to hear how much you like coming to school and how well your cross-country team does. We were pleased to see how well you behave and how you like to learn. It was interesting to hear how many of you like doing mathematics. We were very impressed by how much you know about keeping healthy and how often you choose fruit to eat when you can. You are kept safe in school and are well cared for by all the staff. We were pleased to hear how you can help the school to get better through the 'pupil voice'. It was also interesting to hear about your pen pals in Uganda.

Your headteacher is doing a good job, and your school is improving. However, it is not yet doing as well as it should. For a long time, many of you, although working hard, have not been doing well enough in reading, writing, mathematics and in information and communication technology (ICT). For this reason, though there are many good things about your school, we have given it a notice to improve. More inspectors will come to see how well the school is improving.

Your skills in reading, writing, mathematics and ICT need to get better so that when you are older you will have the confidence and skills to do well. We have asked your teachers to make better use of what they already know about you, to set work that meets the needs of each and every one of you. It is also important that you are told how well you are doing and how you can get better. Please make sure that you ask if you do not know. We want you to have plenty of opportunities to practise your literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. We want all the staff with responsibilities in your school to share in the work that is needed to make the school better.

We are pleased to have seen some of the recent improvements in the school, and are confident that in the future there will be many more to celebrate.

Yours sincerely

Rod Braithwaite
Lead inspector

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